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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [RO](#)  
SUBJECT: CABINET MEMBER TRIES HIS LUCK IN LOCAL ELECTIONS

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Mark Taplin for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Minister of Education Cristian Adomnitei announced April 21 he would take leave from the ministry to commit himself fully to the campaign for the mayor of Iasi, one of the more important Romanian cities. In a discussion with PolOffs on April 22, Adomnitei unveiled the backdoor maneuvering of major political parties, described the tensions inside PNL, and explained why his party favors an alliance with PSD after the next legislative elections this fall. End summary.

Minister ready to quit the cabinet to become mayor  
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¶2. (C) The ruling National Liberal Party (PNL) announced in Mid-March that its young Minister of Education Cristian Adomnitei was picked to be the mayoral candidate for the city of Iasi, the second largest Romanian city. An engineer by training, Adomnitei rose to national prominence in April 2007 when he accepted the challenging portfolio of education in the reshuffled government of PM Calin Popescu-Tariceanu. His nomination sparked virulent media campaigns, and his lack of experience in the field made him an easy target of critics from inside the educational system, not only from President Basescu and from the opposition party, but also from inside the PNL.

¶3. (C) In an April 24 discussion with PolOffs, Adomnitei admitted that he accepted the party mission to run for Mayor of Iasi reluctantly since he still had projects to complete as Minister. He told PolOffs that he could not turn down Tariceanu's offer because the Prime Minister remained his key political backer at the Ministry. Adomnitei noted that other prominent party leaders, including Economy and Finance Minister Varujan Vosganian, had refused to run in Iasi because the PNL candidate would have to face both the popular incumbent Social-Democrat Party (PSD) Mayor Gheorghe Nechita and the candidate of the president's Democratic-Liberal Party (PD-L) Dumitru Oprea. Adomnitei told PolOffs that once he agreed to embark on a difficult electoral campaign, he was determined to win. He said that he decided to run on condition that the PM would continue publicly to support him both as Education Minister and as a candidate.

Mixed balance sheet as Education Minister  
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¶4. (C) So far, PM Tariceanu has kept his pledge, and despite pressures from party colleagues he has refused to reshuffle the education portfolio. In a press conference on April 21, Adomnitei boasted about his accomplishments over the past year. He considered his most important one to be the drafting of a new package of educational reform. Although much criticized, the legislation triggered a national debate on education which eventually ended in the signing in

February of a national pact on education<sup>8</sup> by the president, the government, and all the parliamentary parties and stakeholders within the education system. Adomnitei managed to increase teachers' salaries and to upgrade the IT and non-IT facilities of schools nationwide. While the press considered Adomnitei's balance sheet distinctly mixed,<sup>9</sup> the major complaint being that he did not win over enough political support to have the laws approved by the parliament,<sup>10</sup> analysts and commentators have not been as dismissive of Adomnitei as when he was appointed.

#### Very competitive local elections

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15. (C) Iasi is not only one of the largest cities outside of Bucharest, but also one of the few Romanian cities where the winner in the local election will be difficult to predict. In most local competitions for mayor, the incumbents are best positioned to win another mandate. Competition is wide open for the presidents of county councils who, for the first time in Romania's democratic life, will be elected directly and not selected through the more customary behind closed-door party dealings.

16. (C) The big political stakes in these local elections have pushed parties to try to discourage or co-opt powerful contenders. In his discussion with PolOffs, Adomnitei gave examples of two recent PD-L maneuvers in Iasi. On the mayoral front, the PD-L reportedly has managed to convince a very strong independent candidate to step down and put her support behind the PD-L candidate. At the same time, the popular incumbent president of the county council, Lucian Fleiser, was convinced to switch from the PSD to PD-L, allegedly after being blackmailed. Adomnitei confirmed that his PNL also offered Fleiser the opportunity to run on its ticket.

#### Local politics determined by local deals

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17. (C) Adomnitei confirmed that local party branches, not only in the PNL, but also in the PSD, PD-L and other parties, have freedom to forge any local alliances that might maximize their chances to control the local power levers. In Iasi, Adomnitei personally said he and his party would rather support the PD-L candidate than endorse the incumbent PSD candidate who according to Adomnitei "ruined" the city during his 5-year mandate. In other counties, the PNL has allied with PD-L to oppose the PSD candidate. There are situations, however, where the PSD and PNL are working together against the PD-L, and where the PSD and PD-L have struck separate convenient deals (such as in the county of Mures). Adomnitei insisted that generally speaking PNL branches are worried by the prospect of the PD-L coming to power after the 2008 legislative elections. Some PNL local leaders and activists are more afraid of a Basescu-enhanced PD-L government than the return to the corruption-riddled PSD government of former PM Nastase.

18. (C) Comment: One of the consequences of running a PNL government that holds only 22 percent of the Parliamentary seats is the need to build political alliances when and where it is convenient ("the enemy of my enemy"). Another issue is the persistent difficulty in cultivating and fielding new PNL leaders. Adomnitei's candidacy exemplifies how the PNL bench is thin, reflecting Tariceanu's limited ability to compete his candidates effectively in the local elections without dividing his own ranks. The importance of the local elections should not be underestimated. The winners will have a significant say in how resources are used in this fall's parliamentary contests. End Comment.

TAUBMAN